XIV. *An Account of some new Species of Piper, with a few cursory Observations on the Genus. By Mr. John Vaughan Thompson. Communicated by the Right Honourable Lord Seaforth, F.R.S. and L.S.*

Read June 2, 1807.

Of this extensive and highly natural genus a less intimate knowledge is in general possessed by the European botanist than of most others in which so many plants of interest occur. This circumstance is to be attributed not only to the plants of this genus being all natives of tropical climates, but also to the very strong resemblance of most of the shrubby species to each other, and the impossibility of preserving, by the usual methods, such as are herbaceous and succulent. To obviate this difficulty attending the investigation of the species of the latter description, I had proposed, when in the West Indies, to make drawings of all that I should meet with; but my professional occupations prevented me from carrying this intention into execution so completely as to enable me as yet to lay them before the public. Among the sketches at that time made are the two which accompany this paper, and which, the species appearing to me as nondescript, I conceived might not be unacceptable to the Linnean Society.

Throughout this family the inflorescence is disposed in a scaly spike, or, more properly, a catkin; in most of the species close

and

and imbricated, but in others, particularly the herbaceous species, more open and lax. The flowers, separately examined, consist of an inferior scale, a roundish germen, and two stamina, without the least vestige of a calyx or corolla*. There is no style, but three minute stigmata not easily distinguishable by the naked eye, and the anthers are for the most part sessile; but I cannot be led to think that the filament is entirely wanting in any of the species. Notwithstanding the obvious simplicity of this structure, an attempt has been made in the *Flora Peruviana* (amongst a variety of others) to form the herbaceous species into a new genus, under the name of *Peperomia*. Where this rage will stop it is impossible to predict; and I conceive it to be the duty of every disciple of Linnæus to oppose such innovations, as they cannot fail to produce obscurity and confusion where all was nature and simplicity. The least possible deviation in any one particular must now be considered sufficient to authorise the formation of a new genus; and even the slightest difference of habit alone is frequently thought to afford ample reason for these arbitrary separations. In the present instance, to say more would be to allow that there were grounds for such a change where none really exist. I shall therefore content myself with giving the diagnostic characters, as submitted in the *Flora Peruviana*, and shall leave every person to decide for himself, confident that no true botanist will dissent from my opinion.

"Differt hoc genus a *Pipere* Linn. spathis ovatis, minimis: prominentia minima sub flosculis singulis; staminibus germine longioribus: stigmate puncto unico minimo, vel macula."

* In Woodville's *Medical Botany* a representation of *Piper nigrum* is given, with an *imaginary* dissection of the *corolla*, directly in opposition to the description which accompanies it.

The anomalies necessarily occurring in extensive genera, when properly understood, are to be considered as affording great helps to the inquiries of the practical botanist. In the genus now under consideration they may be made eminently useful: thus, for instance, it may be divided into two sections; the first containing the shrubby species, the other the herbaceous, both of which may be further subdivided into—1st, Such as are erect; and, 2dly, Such as creep or climb, in the following manner.

a * *Fruticosa, erecta.*

Piper Amalago, reticulatum, aduncum, &c.

* * *Fruticosa, scandentia.*

Piper nigrum, longum, &c.

b * *Herbacea, erecta.*

Piper acuminatum, pellucidum, alpinum, &c.

* * *Herbacea, repentia.*

Piper glabellum, obtusifolium, nummularifolium, &c.

It may be worthy of remark that the individuals of the first section are common to both continents, those of the second are confined exclusively to the old, and those of the two last principally to the new.

The species herewith presented belong to the last section, and are all so very strongly and distinctly marked that they cannot fail to be at all times easily discriminated.

PIPER QUADRANGULARE.

TAB. XXI. Fig. 1.

Piper herbaceum, caule quadrangulare radicanti, foliis oppositis rhombeis, pedunculis axillaribus solitariis, spicis binatis.

Habitat

Directions for placing the Plates of the Ninth Volume.

END OF THE NINTH VOLUME.

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